DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 167 FL 000 897

By- Smith, Sidney

Historical Linguistics and the Teaching of German.

American Association of Teachers of German.
Pub Date Mar 68
Note- 8p.
Journal Cit- The German Quarterly; v41 n2 p231-38 Mar 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.58
Descriptors- Applied Linguistics, *College Language Programs, Contrastive Linguistics, *Diachronic Linguistics, *German, Instructional Improvement, *Language Instruction, Teacher Education, *Teaching Techniques

Suggestions are made on the inclusion of historical linguistics in beginning or intermediate German classes in an attempt to show why the prospective teacher ought to have a knowledge of the history of the language. Appropriate levels are cited for the instructional suggestions given. (AF)

ED025167

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING OF GERMAN

Sidney Smith

It has become standard practice for departments offering a Ph.D. in German to require its graduate students to take a course in the history of the German language. The department feels not quite respectable without this course and possibly also some courses in older dialects, especially Middle High German. At the same time it is very likely that department members who specialize in literature of recent centuries have at best a very vague feeling that study of historical linguistics is "a good thing," though they cannot really say *why* it is good. Worse still, the graduate students, most of them prospective teachers of German, do not understand why they "have to take this stuff." They are generally inclined to view their Middle High German or historical linguistics courses simply as a hurdle to be surmounted. "I did my stint in Middle High German," they have been heard to say.

Occasionally one reads or hears some general statements supporting the idea of studying the history of the German language. One seldom finds reference to specific instances where a teacher's knowledge of this history can be made meaningful in his teaching of undergraduates or high school students. The present article proposes to skip generalities and to direct attention to a number of situations where reference to historical matters is appropriate. Yet no extravagant claims should be made for the virtues of applied historical linguistics. It is a mistake for the instructor to drag forth his knowledge at every possible point when the student is still grappling with the elementary aspects of German. The tyro will be more bedazzled than helped if his teacher sprinkles Middle High German forms among the modern forms on which a beginner has ever so shaky a grip.

Conceivably the student in his second semester of German may have enough of the modern language "under his belt" to be able to appreciate some of the niceties of language development. More likely it will be the third or fourth semester—or even later—when he will begin to wonder about quirks of the language and how they got that way. Of the various points to be discussed below, some may evoke questions from elementary students; others will not be eligible

FL 000 897

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

for discussion until students have achieved something of an overview of the language. Some matters can be brought into the classroom as an aid to learning the modern language; other items will be of great interest to intelligent students without having immediate pragmatic potentiality. If the teacher shows an interest in the linguistic background and occasionally discusses German from this standpoint, the students will be inspired to think more about language development and will tend to show curiosity in this area.

We may concentrate first on those areas in which the introduction of historical explication may be a direct aid in the teaching and learning of German. Probably a great number of teachers take time, in their first-year classes, to point out relationships between English and German consonants, especially with reference to those changes associated with the High German Sound Shift. Any such discussion should be prefaced by a brief consideration of *why* English and German have similarities. It has never occurred to most undergraduates that English is a Germanic language. At the same time, the distinction between inherited (Germanic) words and those words received from Romance and other languages must be emphasized. Unfortunately, very few of the currently used textbooks include a comparison of cognates in English and German; one can mention Schinnerer's *Beginning German,* Ellert and Heller's *German One* (which compares related words in Latin, English, and German), Corkran's *Practical German Review Grammar,* and several others.

The students may be confronted with a series of words like *Ding, danken,* and *Durst* and allowed to perceive for themselves that German *d* may correspond to English *th*. When the many correspondences have been surveyed, one might encourage the students to learn illustrative word-pairs (e.g., *Pfeffer: pepper*) rather than formulae (German *pf, ff* = English *p, pp*). Students may be challenged to deduce the English equivalents of a substantial number of words which probably have not yet occurred in their learning experience. At second-semester level some of the following words may be appropriate:

Becher	Futter	Leber
bergen	heben	Malz
Bude	Hügel	Nagel
dreschen	Joch	Pflaster
Eiche	Kessel	Pflaume
falten	Kupfer	pflücken

Rabe	Sieb	zahm
Schaufel	Siegel	Zinn
Schweiß	triefen	Zoll
Segel	weben	Zweig

It is also wise to discuss cognate words which have developed divergent meanings in English and German. Students find it particularly interesting to contemplate semantic changes. One may cite some of the following word-pairs:

Gasse: gate	Stube: stove
Knabe: knave	traurig: dreary
Pflicht: plight	tüchtig: doughty
reißen: write	Urteil: ordeal
schlagen: slay	Zaun: town
selig: silly	Zimmer: timber

The main goal of word comparison like the above will be the enrichment of the students' vocabulary. In actual experience one generally finds that even those who are well aware of the above-mentioned relationships do not think of exploiting their knowledge when they come across unfamiliar words. Students instinctively reach for a dictionary or turn to a glossary. If it does not occur to the student to use English-German correspondences in his "educated guessing" of unfamiliar words, he will at least have a better chance of retaining the new vocabulary whenever he perceives a kinship with English words. The learner should not have to look up *streben, Hagel,* or *Taube* more than once.

Another relationship worth mentioning in the German class is that of the vowels in some English and German words, although in this case matters are not quite so simple as they were with the consonants. A fair number of cognate words have /ai/ in both languages (e.g., German *beißen, Eis, Pfeife, schmeißen* and their English cognates); some word-pairs have /ai/ in German but /o:/ in English (e.g., *Eiche, Geiß, heilig, Heim, Kleid, Stein* beside *oak, goat,* etc.). Cognate pairs with /i:/ are easy to find (e.g., *Dieb, frieren, Grieche, Siegel* beside *thief, freeze,* etc.). Correspondence of German *ü* and English *i* can be noted *(dünn, küssen, Münze* beside *thin, kiss, mint),* and other cognate words involving umlauted vowels can be compared *(zwölf, Hölle* beside *twelve, hell; fällen, zählen* beside *to fell, to tell).* With such relationships it may or may not be useful to direct a few remarks toward the prototype forms.

A further matter for attention is the situation resulting from the Old English loss of nasals before *f*, *þ*, and *s*. One can cite here such pairs as

ander: other (OE ōþar)
fünf: five(OE fīf)
Gans: goose (OE gōs)
Mund: mouth (OE mūđ)
sanft: soft (OE sōfte)
uns: us (OE ūs)
wünschen: wish (OE wȳscan)

It must be admitted that most words in this category are so basic that the first-year student will have learned them by the time the instructor begins to mention etymological connections.

A study of word-formation belongs in every undergraduate's study of German. Comparison of suffixes like German *-isch* and English *-ish, -lich* and *-ly, -ig* and *-y* is clearly appropriate. Latin elements appearing with their original gender in suffixes like *-tät* and *-tion* should be included here. Iterative verbs like *lächeln* (beside *lachen*), *schütteln* (beside *schütten*), and *hüsteln* (beside *husten*), with an *l*-element reminiscent of *-lein* of diminutives, can be considered too. Parallel English formations with *l*, such as *hurtle, snuffle, sparkle,* and *drawl,* may be cited. Likewise the etymological and semantic relationship of German verbs with *-ern* and English verbs with *-er* deserves mention (e.g., *stottern: stutter, zwitschern: twitter, schlummern: slumber*).

Cited thus far are those features of German and English the comparison of which may be directly useful for the student in his learning of German, as soon as he has acquired enough vocabulary and grammar to have some basis for the comparison. There are a number of other relationships of lesser pragmatic worth which can greatly enrich a course when added in moderation. And moderation is much to be recommended; the instructor must not let his enthusiasm for historical linguistics defeat his purpose, which is to teach New High German to undergraduates. But he can add spice and variety to the course, and he can encourage students to think about German and about their own language as well.

Early in his learning career the student is faced with *ich kann, er kann, wir können,* and he is likely to ask, "Why is there no *-t* in the third person singular?" (He never worried about *he can*—with

no *s*—because he grew up with the word.) More likely, he asks no questions about the German but writes or says "er kannt" or even "er könnt." In the first-year class the teacher is probably wisest if he simply says, "Don't worry about the irregularity, but note that the English is also irregular." In a higher-level course, especially with brighter students, the teacher may want to outline briefly the historical basis for the preterite-present verbs.

In the student's first contact with German strong verbs he should concentrate on learning the principal parts with all their apparent irregularities. Later the instructor could give some clue as to why one finds alternation of consonants in verbs like

erkiesen—erkor—erkoren
hauen—hieb—gehauen
leiden—litt—gelitten
ziehen—zog—gezogen

and he could also point to the relationships in word-pairs like *frieren / Frost, verlieren / Verlust,* and *waren / Wesen.*

An advanced student is perhaps even entitled to know what lies behind the ablaut patterns in the German (and English) strong verbs. At any rate one can show how these verbs are not really "irregular," in spite of the pedagogical usefulness of calling them thus at an elementary level. Allusion may be made to the conditioning involved in the deviant vocalisms in *binden* and *helfen, gebunden* and *geholfen.* Again, the teacher may have occasion to comment upon the so-called "double infinitive"—how it preserves an old form instead of substituting a new one. Remarks may be made about the historical correctness of subjunctive forms like *hülfe, stürbe, stünde,* etc., which were preserved partly to avoid the confusion of *er hälfe* : *er helfe,* etc.

The instructor needs to point out that German verbs of more recent vintage are weak verbs (e.g., verbs in *-ieren*: *telefonieren, plakatieren,* etc.), and that most verbs strong in English are also strong in German. Comparison of *bringen / brachte* with *bring / brought* is usual. Causative and denominative verbs may also be discussed; verb pairs like *fallen / fällen, sitzen / setzen,* and *liegen / legen* may be compared with their English counterparts.

In connection with the denominative and causative verbs, it is not amiss to refer to the original method of formation—the *jan* suffix —and to the resultant umlaut phenomenon. The intelligent student will

be interested to learn that there is a pattern behind it all. Likewise other umlaut effects may be cited, such as the change of vowel in the second and third person singular of many strong verbs, the subjunctive forms like *er gäbe* and *er käme,* the comparative and superlative forms with umlaut (contrasted with those showing no umlaut), and the diminutives with *-chen* (formerly *-ichen*) and *-lein* (formerly *-lîn*). The better students will be curious to know why noun plurals in *-er* are accompanied by mutation of the preceding vowel, and why some but not all masculine nouns with *-e* plurals have mutation of the stem vowel. If an uninformed teacher simply says, "Never mind, just learn it," the students with curiosity about such things will go away unsatisfied.

Students have asked, "Why is there no umlaut in *Rucksack?* Why none in *Innsbruck?*" "What is the connection between *drucken* and *drücken, benutzen* and *benützen?*" Knowledge of the historical development and limits of umlaut would enable the instructor to give a concise and satisfying answer.

It is perplexing to give rules and then be faced with apparent exceptions. The teacher should be able to explain why, in spite of the two consonants, one finds a long vowel in words like *Jagd, Obst,* and *Krebs.* Citation of Middle High German *jaget, obez,* and *krebez* throw some light on the problem even if the problem is not entirely removed. Middle High German forms are illuminating elsewhere, too. Modern *fressen* can be compared to MHG *verezzen; Welt,* scarcely resembling English *world,* becomes more meaningful with the mention of MHG *wërelt,* OHG *wër-alt.*

The teacher of German needs to know and recognize older forms for another reason. In the reading of literature written as late as the nineteenth century one can find archaic forms like *du sollt, er fleugt, er kreucht,* and, fairly recently, *er ward.* These forms should be understood by the teacher even if he chooses not to explain them. A shrug of the shoulder and a look of puzzlement is not enough.

Likewise the reading of literature will involve dialect words and regionalisms which the teacher should be able to identify as such. Common examples are *man* (for *nur*), *geen* (for *kein*), *ma* (for *wir*), *frug* (for *fragte*), and the regional subjunctive *er bräuchte.* One only need observe various works of Gerhart Hauptmann, many of which are found in second- and third-semester readers.

Loanwords are always an interesting subject for classroom discussion. The adoption of many English words in recent times is particularly worth comment; earlier loans from French, and the vast stock of words from Latin, may also invite remarks. One should be able to identify place-names and personal names of Slavic origin by observing their suffixes (*Pankow, Berlin, Chemnitz,* etc.). The teacher can invite suggestions as to why *Mauer* is feminine while *murus* is masculine. And why does *fenestra* (feminine) develop into neuter *Fenster?* The students are told that nouns in *-in* are feminine, but a sharp one in the class may ask about the masculine *Rubin*. Citation of Latin *rubinus* answers the question.

There are still more areas where the teacher of an advanced section will be called upon to explain certain quirks. There are puzzling expressions like *auf gut deutsch* and *zwei Glas Bier*. There are analogical changes which have produced curious combinations like *backen, backte, gebacken*. There are instances of metathesis of *r* (*brennen / burn, Ross/ horse, Brunnen / Born*) which perceptive students wonder about.

In any class session, whether there is emphasis on reading or on conversation, there will occur a considerable number of words the etymologies of which would be of great interest to students. The teacher must not let himself get carried away with this sort of thing, but now and then he can add interest to his presentation by commenting upon an especially interesting word. Popular etymologies can bring an amusing note to the classroom and can shed light on cognate words like *Bräutigam / bridegroom.*

Many undergraduates will have been exposed to samples of Chaucerian English by the end of their sophomore year, and all will have read some Shakespeare by that time. Once interest in etymology and semantics has been aroused, these students will often enjoy dredging up archaic English words and forms which are somehow similar to the German words they see. Bright students readily come up with forms like *wot* and *wiste* (German *weiß, wußte*), *holt* (German *Holz*), *eek* (German *auch*), and *ken* (German *kennen;* "D'ye ken John Peel?"). Students will see parallels in the German and English infinitives with *-en* (Middle English *helpen* as well as modern *open, awaken, soften,* etc.) and past participles (older *holpen,* modern *shaven, risen,* etc.). Change in meaning of words like English *deer* (formerly 'animal') will also evoke comment. Experience provides

ED025167

phrases like *Sumer is icumen in* as parallels to German *ist gekommen,* both with respect to the auxiliary verb and to the *ge- / i-* prefix of the past participle. And nearly every teacher of German has quoted "The Lord is come" when auxiliary verbs of the perfect tense are discussed.

Cited above are numerous instances where a teacher of German may well have occasion to allude to the historical development of the language. The instructor will have to judge for himself whether his particular group of undergraduates can profit by such discussion, and, if he does seek to include historical matter, he must take care not to become tedious with it. He must not lose sight of the fact that he is *not* teaching a course in historical linguistics. The discussion has attempted to answer the question, "Why should a prospective teacher of German study the history of the German language?" Even for those who choose not to discuss the matters cited in this article, there is one particularly compelling answer to this question: From having studied the development of German, the teacher will at least know enough not to make stupid statements about the language he is teaching.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The German Quarterly

VOL. XLI - MARCH, 1968 - No. 2

PUBLISHED BY
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF GERMAN
in January, March, May, and November
Membership Issue in September